The PULPIT

A Periodical of Contemporary Preaching

JULY 1949

When God Says 'No'

By HAROLD BLAKE WALKER

Happiness Is Not an Inalienable Right

By FREDERICK M. MEEK

The Testimony of Time

By CARADOC JAMES MORGAN

Our Refuge In Dark Days

By BINNEY SIMPSON BLACK

We Believe In The Church

By HAROLD A. BOSLEY

Mousetraps and Sermons

By GEORGE LAWRENCE PARKER

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Charles Clayton Morrison, *Editor*

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In the August Issue

In his sermon "On Being Spiritually Prepared for Life" WILLIAM H. HUDNUT, Jr., of Third Presbyterian Church, Rochester, N. Y., considers the story of Peter and shows how that apostle was transformed from his impulsive discipleship into a man who could say at the last: "Now I am ready, Lord, to go with thee both to prison and to death."

Once pastor of Normal Park Baptist Church, Chicago, JAMES C. O'FLAHERTY is now a professor in Wake Forest College. His sermon in the next issue is on "Christ, the Builder of Life," with its text, Isa. 60:1—"Arise, shine, for thy light is come."

QUENTIN LEISHER, of the Congregationalist Church, Cohasset, Mass., in his sermon "Saved by Hope" shows how the Christian church, by putting its hope not in power, might and material things, but in "the things which are not seen," could save the world from its present plight.

The time has come for the church "to leave the coastline of our low-vaulted ecclesiastical past" and to realize that there is order in God's design, and to "shoot for the sun." A call to the church to make a great adventure for God and his truth. That is the theme of the sermon "Keeping on Course" by ROBERT J. PLUMB of Washington, D. C.

ENSWORTH REISNER of First Methodist Church, Milwaukee, does not seek for a "modern" text, but takes an old and good one, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

FLOYD V. FILSON of McCormick Seminary will contribute a Preacher Problems article on "What Shall I Preach?"

WHO'S WHO IN THIS ISSUE

REV. FREDERICK M. MEEK is minister of the Old South Church in Boston (Congregational). He was formerly pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, Des Moines, Ia. He has long been connected with the Council for Social Action of the Congregational fellowship and has served on the editorial board of *Advance*.

REV. GEORGE L. PARKER was for many years minister of Unitarian churches in Keene, N. H., and Duxbury, Mass., and is now a resident of Carver, Mass.

Born in Wales, REV. CARADOC J. MORGAN is a graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary. Earlier pastorates were in Oregon City, Ore., Chicago, and Hutchinson, Minn. For eight years he has ministered at Pilgrim Congregational Church, Portland, Ore. He is the author of *The People's Bible*.

REV. BINNEY S. BLACK is a son of the manse. His father, Rev. James R. Black, was at one time chairman of the Congregational Union of Canada. For the past eight years, the son has ministered at Bonar Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Can. In earlier years he served two Congregational churches in New York state.

The sermon in this issue by DR. HAROLD A. BOSLEY was preached at the Chicago Sunday Evening Club. For a number of years Dr. Bosley was minister of Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church, Baltimore, but is now Dean of the Divinity School of Duke University. He has published several books.

Nearly two years ago REV. HAROLD BLAKE WALKER left First Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City to assume the pastorate of First Presbyterian Church, Evanston, Ill. Mr. Walker received his later education at Denver University, Boston University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago.

REV. HERBERT B. HUDNUT is minister of Woodward Avenue Presbyterian Church, Detroit, Mich.

REV. LEWIS H. DAVIS ministers at Prospect Methodist Church, Bristol, Conn.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE

The Event of the Month

THE General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., meeting in Buffalo, took the initial steps toward a reconstruction of the ecclesiastical organization of the denomination. The plan, to be completed in the next two years, affects chiefly (1) the synods, (2) the presbyteries and (3) the General Council. The 40 synods now are coterminous with the states of the nation. They have been hardly more than an ecclesiastical fifth wheel, without substantial functions. Their number will be reduced by consolidation into 12 regional synods, having an average constituency of about 200,000 members each, and provided with strong executive leadership within the new synods. The presbyteries will be regrouped on a minimum basis of 3,000 members for each presbytery. The two principles embodied in these changes are closer integration of the whole denomination and the decentralizing of functions. The General Council will become a responsible executive committee for the entire church, taking over many of the functions long exercised by the stated clerk and vested with authority to act between the meetings of the General Assembly. In my judgment, this plan not only marks an advance for Presbyterianism but has significance for a united Protestantism. The regional idea for synods parallels in a general way the regional jurisdictions adopted by Methodism when North and South united some years ago. The Buffalo General Assembly asked the southern Presbyterian church to join in a call for the merging of all churches of the Presbyterian order. The new plan of regional synods should facilitate such a union.

Presbyterians Adopt Reconstruction Plan

The Book of the Month

FAITH AND HISTORY. *By Reinhold Niebuhr. Scribners, $3.50.*

HAVE you yet come to terms with the eschatological interpretation of the New Testament? If not, you are missing the major point in the theological development and discussion that is now in full stream. I am not suggesting that you should be a convert to this view, but only that you should understand what modern scholarship is telling us about Jesus himself and the nature of the faith which his life, his teaching, his death and resurrection kindled in the minds and hearts of his disciples. A book by almost any New Testament scholar—Clarence T. Craig, John Knox, Frederick Grant, Amos N. Wilder, to name only a few American writers, and C. H. Dodd of England—will provide one with the basic knowledge required for an understanding of such theologians as Niebuhr, Brunner and Barth. Otherwise, this book by Professor Niebuhr will be an enigma to the reader. One cannot even criticize or oppose him intelligently without knowing the New Testament premise upon which he builds his theology. His latest book deals with the problem of faith in relation to a history and a time process that is coming to an end—a final judgment and a deliverance that is "beyond history." He argues against all philosophies that postulate moral progress, or evolution, in history and maintains that the Christian cannot discern God's purpose in terms of the cumulative progress of events. He must live by faith alone, awaiting the fulfillment of God's purpose at the end of history. Every minister should read this book—but not until he comes to terms with the New Testament premise which it presupposes.

A Thought for the Month

ONE of my favorite texts is that verse in Hebrews which pictures a great multitude in an amphitheater looking on as we run our race in the stadium below. We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses. All who have gone before are watching eagerly because they have an actual stake in our performance. They are the heroes of all the past, but for all their achievements they had to leave their own race unfinished. Even our Lord himself, as Paul teaches, left the cup of his suffering to be filled up by all faithful souls who have fellowship with him in the way of the cross. The heroes of all our yesterdays look down upon us as actual participants in our race—for they without us cannot be made perfect. History is a continuum. It is a relay race—we start at the point where other runners left off, and our race is an extension of theirs. They cannot win unless we win! Think of the unfinished tasks which they have handed on to us. Jefferson achieved democracy—but we stagger under the burden of making democracy work. Lincoln achieved emancipation—but left us the race problem. Luther achieved the Reformation—but left us the enormous problem of overcoming Protestant sectarianism. The missionaries planted the church in the Orient—ours is today the far greater task of keeping it there. Name any great achievement of the past and you will find that it was left unfinished. That is the way life is made. We do not honor the faith of our fathers by trying to live their lives over again. We honor them by starting where they left off and carrying forward their noble adventure.

Completing the Faith Of the Fathers

Charles Clayton Morrison

Happiness Is Not an Inalienable Right

By FREDERICK M. MEEK

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Matthew 13:44.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. John 15:11.

I

THE life of this American nation is by definition associated with happiness in a way known to no other people. The pursuit of happiness is a right specified in the initial declaratory document of our national life, the Declaration of Independence. There the pursuit of life, of liberty, of happiness, are forever indicated as being among the primary rights of our people. (Of course our way of life holds that this right is not our peculiar possession, for it belongs to mankind as a whole.) The older pattern which inspired Thomas Jefferson to set down these three rights of pursuit came from the Englishman John Locke. He had spoken specifically of the rights of life, liberty and property. Thomas Jefferson regarded this as inadequate. Therefore he made this significant change by which in the Declaration of Independence "happiness" was substituted for the word "property."

It does no violence to Jefferson the religious seeker (who is the forgotten Jefferson) to say that the political Jefferson thought of happiness in more basic spiritual terms than do the Americans of our time who are the heirs of his work. For Jefferson, happiness came through the search after those experiences which a man's interpretation of life made most significant for him. At the heart of human life and of our world, Jefferson found a unifying moral power, which if recognized would give unity to a man's living and thus prevent man's search for happiness from becoming simply a search in individual anarchy.

This all too brief historical word is necessary background for our thinking about happiness this morning.

II

Obviously one of the major interests of our people is in happiness. People dream of happiness, they plan for it, they live enveloped in a never ending search for it. The search itself is widely varied. In a quest for happiness one man explores the Arctic regions; some men grow roses, write poems, paint pictures; one man becomes a monk, many become sensualists. The quest for happiness explains why night clubs and movies, race tracks and sport amphitheaters have their millions in attendance. In the search for happiness one man buys a half-dozen homes, another goes into the wilderness. But always in the midst of the search, satisfied or unsatisfied, men have the conviction that somewhere, somehow, there are things, deeds, a way of living, that can make them happy.

If we were asked to say what we mean by happiness, few of us could answer satisfactorily. For most of us happiness is summed up in terms of a feeling of pleasure, of undisturbed contentment, of physical sensation, of the satisfaction of desire. American life thinks of happiness in terms of separate episodes and experiences—a movie, a meal, a car, a book, a journey, an hour of companionship—rather than in terms of a life, or of a person whose happiness is such that it is not wholly dependent upon the presence or the absence of single episodes or experiences or possessions. And therefore we are an unhappy people.

A little time ago I read the publisher's advertisement describing a new book written about plastic surgery. The headline of the advertisement said, "Unhappiness is only skin deep." The judgment upon the external character of happiness is one of the major points of reference from which our generation sets out to pursue happiness. It was the conclusion of the extraordinary Round Table on Happiness held by *Life* magazine that happiness is sought chiefly in America in external ways. All around us our society and people are promising us happiness through external means. Part of the procedure is to promise us that if we purchase a device or a product (which are inanimate and material) we will receive and achieve spiritual results —changes in the character and the quality of our lives. And that is nonsense! Thus discontent and unhappiness are fostered and nurtured by our society.

On a larger national scale, men are sure that if only we can find an economic or a political formula, then mankind will be happy. Granted that much unhappiness is caused by man's inability or unwillingness or failure to deal adequately with political and economic problems. But after the economic problems have been settled, and after political animosities have been reconciled, and after world government has been established by the most satisfactory pattern which the genius of man can devise, happiness is not thereby guaranteed to all or to any, because the major problems of human life would still remain unsatisfied: How is life to be lived? What is life's meaning? This is not to say that problems of economic and political concern are not major matters of moment in our century.

They are. Indeed, upon their successful resolution depends the continuance of the chance to pursue happiness by us and mankind as a whole.

III

The fact remains that external means to happiness are not enough. Evidently there has come into common acceptance a kind of amendment to the Declaration of Independence. The third right mentioned by Thomas Jefferson (the right of the pursuit of happiness) now has a qualification. We declare ourselves independent of the right to pursue happiness, and we transform the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence into the declaration of a demand upon life. We would make our inalienable right, not the right to pursue happiness, but the right to happiness without the pursuit. And thus we ask of life more than is possible. If we look closely we will see that our demand is also the right to the happiness of property, to material things and to external experiences which we can possess. And thus the whole organizing center of life is changed—and for the worse. A man may have everything and still fail to find happiness.

There are no more pathetic words than these which are used so often unwittingly to express this basic change, this demand on life, words used so often to justify what men and women want to do irrespective: "I've got a right to be happy!" This is the attitude of the emotionally and the spiritually immature, who make little attempt to take into consideration anything or anyone else, because paramount for them, are themselves and their own desires. No man, no woman ever has the right even to attempt to pursue happiness in that way. Of course, there are many times when such a pursuit brings an episodic, a single or a limited pleasure. And that fact makes life and its unifying patterns difficult to pursue, so difficult that the most sensitive spirits are always alert lest episodic pleasures destroy the capacity for and the interest in the primary happiness of a whole life. The words of anger, of bitterness, of hostility, the act of adultery, the sneer of racial superiority, the continuing alcoholic haze, the smart deal that defrauds, the ruthless experience of power—all these can bring a satisfaction in some immediate present, and a particular kind of limited pleasure. But, equally, they produce a kind of life in which the happiness of an integrated human personality at its best, finding an incalculable joy in fulfilling its best capacities, by being the kind of person God purposed, is never realized, and the person remains ever restless, ever filled with the disillusion of the competitive desires of our society, ever insecure. And finally, if continuing in this way, the person knows the bitterness of the personal defeat of life.

IV

There are then two things constantly to be remembered as we think of and as we seek happiness. If we could satisfy all our desires, and if we could have everything upon which we have set our hearts, happiness would not thereby of necessity come to us. Indeed, such surfeit of satisfaction would be the surest of all ways to make sure that we would never know happiness.

I do well to remind you of young Bob. Bob went to visit his favorite aunt. "Bob," she said, "what do you want most of all?" "You know," he answered, "I've never had enough pancakes in my life. My mother always says, 'Three are enough for any boy.' " At that first breakfast the pancakes kept coming in, piled high. After a time Bob began to slow down, and finally he stopped. "Why, Bob," asked his aunt, "don't you want any more pancakes?" "No, I don't want any more. I don't even want those I've already had." Happiness does not come from the simple multiplication of things, nor from ease of satisfying desire. Yet such convictions about the possibility of knowing happiness by external means and through the unlimited satisfaction of desire, are enshrined as embodying the sought-after achievement of living for so many, even while they are also the source of the most profound unhappiness.

V

The second thing to keep in mind is this: A person's concentration on happiness is self-defeating. Years ago Dr. Tittle of Evanston put that truth in words that are always relevant: "The moment you allow your own happiness to become the supreme object of your endeavor, inevitably you begin to play safe, and before long you are playing entirely too safe to be happy. You stop working at the point where work ceases to yield an easily purchased pleasure, and so deprive yourself of that far greater pleasure that comes from hard work. You stop giving at the point where you can give without feeling it, and so deprive yourself of the joy that comes from giving that has reached the point of sacrifice. You even stop loving when it begins to hurt, and so miss the supreme joy of a love that suffers long and is kind. The pursuit of happiness is always an unhappy pursuit because it engenders in the pursuer a self-concern. It defeats its own object. In our over-anxiety to be happy, we stop at the very point where we have our first great chance to be happy."

If we are honest, some of us will admit that we have never really opened the doors of life wide enough to let in any affection other than that which we have for ourselves, to let in any great cause other than that which ministers to our immediate desire or demand for happiness. Under such circumstances we say that we love another, but what we really love is what that person can do for us! Our children must minister to our self-esteem; a wife, a husband, other people, must never cross us and differ from us—because then we blame them for destroying our happiness, when perhaps our happiness is only to be found in our fulfilling their need.

VI

Actually happiness is a by-product, a by-product which comes into our possession when we have lost ourselves in a kind of living that is not self-centered. Miss Mannes was writing directly to women, but the primary truth is no less accurate for us men when she said that happiness can never be achieved by rote.

"Walk down Fifth Avenue," she said, "and see the discontent under the pert hats. The street is full of sullen mouths, perfectly painted. . . . I know a woman," she went on, "who has gray hair and is not beautiful. When she is not working for the merchant seamen she is extraordinarily happy learning Chinese with her husband, who hopes to work there some day in rehabilitation. Her hips are a bit wide and her apartment a bit narrow, but she is far from being desperate. . . . I could name a great many more, some of them are well off, some of them are not, some of them are good-looking, many are not. Among the married ones their marriages have had rocky moments, but all of them haye stopped looking frantically for happiness. They have found it in small things, every day. They have, however, two common denominators. One is, they have all suffered a certain amount. (How strange to think of pain of mind or heart or body being a vehicle on which happiness comes riding into life!) The other is, that all have concentrated on people more than on themselves."

VII

Some of us are forced to overcome enormous initial disadvantages even to attempt to live life, let alone find happiness. Here, for example, is Henry Wallin who lived in Cambridge. Henry Wallin was so badly crippled that when he went to Harvard, his course took him seven years and he had to be wheeled from class to class in a chair. He was in constant physical pain. But in the midst of that pain he made himself expert in deciphering ancient Pali manuscripts. The pain was so great that he could not sit to write, and he had to write his pages before a high desk with his crutches under his arms. And then, when he could stand that no longer, he knelt in front of a chair in order to take the strain off his back. Out of that circumstance came his translations of ancient Buddhist scriptures. One of the greatest of all the Buddhists paid a special visit to Cambridge to bring him the thanks of India. In the midst of his disability and pain because of his absorption in a task that had meaning, he found happiness.

The Christian faith has often been caricatured, sometimes by its critics, sometimes by its followers, as being repressive and unhappy. Such a charge is untrue to its nature. Its essential nature is that of a wholeness of life bringing the most expansive joy.

And why should it not be so? For this faith puts a man in line with the greatest of satisfactions, the satisfaction of a unified life which he finds as he fulfills the purpose of the Creator God. We have found intimations of the satisfaction of this joy of wholeness as we are participants, not spectators, in some of the events of life, the satisfaction of a well-executed back hand, of a perfect drive down a fairway, of following and being moved by the composer's insight as we sing or play, the satisfaction of following a great mind in the truths which it sets down on a page, the joy of knowing a great elevating heroic love, the satisfaction in accomplishing a desperately difficult task even at pain and toil beyond known human endurance.

VIII

Ah! but there is the greater joy in the fulfillment of a whole life purpose which is not simply an episode; there is the sense of the freedom of finding, exploring, following the primary way of all life that takes in everything we do and are. This joy and this freedom the Christian faith can and will bring!

The Christian has always insisted that the great search of life is the search for the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God sounds like a remote far-away region with which we need not concern ourselves in a busy episodic life. But the Kingdom of God, the unified way of God's purpose, is immediate; it is even now present. The Kingdom of God is within the person, and everything else is external to that. We find the Kingdom of God where we are, and in the finding of it we know our greatest happiness. We find it by doing what lies to our hand, realizing that we labor with God.

Do you recall that single verse parable from our scripture lesson, the story of the man who found the treasure in the field? There is an obvious meaning in that sentence, so obvious that I am ashamed to tell you that it missed me for years. I used to think that the man was treasure-hunting. He was not. The point of the parable is that the man was a farmer, and he found the treasure as he was busy about his work, digging in the field, doing what he had to do in the ordinary affairs of life. He found something so precious and so commanding as he dug in the field, that it was worth everything else.

IX

You and I live in a day so demanding in the quality of life that it asks from us, that meeting the demands should take us out from under the domination of the external, should take us out from under an enslavement of things and possessions, should take us out from under the tyranny of the competitive pressures of trying to own and possess everything that everyone else on the street has—together with something additional. In difficult times life strips us of the unessentials. And today beyond all else our objective is to have and to fulfill this life of God.

There is a fair comparison between ourselves and the experience of Sir Ernest Shackelton and his companions on their Antarctic expedition. The weather had been enormously difficult and it had hampered their progress, and they had found themselves out in the Antarctic wastes, far from the cachés of food and the places of shelter, and it was necessary to make forced marches if they were to live. They were compelled to throw aside all the extra encumbrances—extra food, extra clothes, scientific instruments, even the coins of the homeland that they had carried in their pockets. But the men kept the pictures of their families at home. That is, they kept that which reminded them of the best that their lives knew, and they let all the rest go. In the Antarctic wastes in an hour of difficulty there was a purging of desire, and an elimination of the un-

necessary, and the greatest and the most important things loomed first.

No man is ever happy so that that "lost radiance" of the Christian faith comes alive in him and his days, until he willingly gives himself and what he does over to the direction of the Christian understanding of life. That decision purges life of irrelevant and secondary desire. In the end, the quest for happiness is tied up with our understanding of life and nature. Dr. Herbert Gray says "that while we remain partially paralyzed by inaccurate thoughts of God we cannot find our true happiness, cannot be reconciled to each other, cannot attain to our true power, for fear always depresses; joy alone creates energy." When a man has found what God means and is, he knows joy at its best. He is released from preoccupation with himself, his capacity to live and to work is heightened, his outreach into the community is broadened, his sympathies and activities extend to the great moral and social concerns of our time, his sensitivities are heightened, he lives from a great depth of being; and thus his joy is more profound, his laughter is more hearty, his life is more stable. When we sense that behind all the external paraphernalia of life there is One who himself has affection for us and has a way for us, then in the attempted fulfillment of his purpose come a happiness and a joy which are life's greatest achievement. Life becomes the pursuit of the great purpose—and single episodes or single possessions or single experiences no longer dominate us.

X

Here both happiness and pain are gathered up. It was George Eliot who said: "We can only have the highest happiness by having wide thoughts (and I add that they must be so wide that they are in truth the thoughts of God himself), a feeling for the rest of the world as well as for ourselves; and this kind of happiness often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before anything else because our souls see that it is good. But if we are afraid of this, then we will always be seeking, but never finding, happiness."

When God Says 'No'

By HAROLD BLAKE WALKER

For this thing I besought God thrice, that it might depart from me. II Corinthians 12:8.

IT IS SIGNIFICANT to observe that the greatest of all Christian missionaries was a man who through all his days bore a physical affliction. He had what he called "a thorn in the flesh." Joseph Klausner, great Jewish scholar, thinks Paul was an epileptic. There are other scholars who insist he suffered from persistent malaria, still others who think he had arthritis. In any case, Paul was a constant sufferer and he was troubled. He was giving his life for his Lord, and it seemed only reasonable that God should take away his infirmity. So, as Paul wrote the Corinthian church, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Nevertheless, saint though he was, Paul carried his affliction to the grave. So much the record makes clear.

I

Obviously, Paul was no spiritual neophyte. He was a spiritual giant. He wrote more of the New Testament than any other man. He started more churches than any single man before or since. He laid the foundations for Christian theology. He endured persecution and risked death a dozen times for the sake of the gospel of Christ. But despite all that, God said "No" when Paul prayed to be relieved of his affliction. Paul went on suffering and serving to the end of his days. A lesser man would have said it was not fair, or else assumed he needed a new technique to persuade the reluctance of God. It was not so with Paul. He took his pain in his stride saying: "Most gladly . . . will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Like Paul, we may as well face the fact that there are times when God says "No" to our petitions, however ardently they are uttered. Who can forget the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as the sweat stood out on his forehead: "Let this cup pass from me"? Suffering and death awaited Jesus and in the agony of the hour he prayed to be saved. But God said "No." And without that terrible "No" there would have been no Easter, no shining crosses, to stir the dull world's soul. Without that awful "No" in the garden there would have been no light beyond the dark.

Still, we are resentful when our skies tumble in with God's thundering "No." Like Martin Luther we shout in our petulant rage: "My God, art thou dead?" In our frustration we turn our backs upon God and cease to believe in him. If God will not do what we want done, what's the use of having faith? If prayer does not get us what we want, what's the use of praying? As one woman said to her pastor: "I have been pray-

ing incessantly for God to heal my sick son. If he does not do something soon I will lose my faith in him." Our unbelief, you see, is mostly a matter of psychological frustration.

Where we go wrong is in the naive feeling that by way of Christian faith and ardent prayer we should become perfectly healthy, wealthy and popular. But, as the old song has it: "It isn't necessarily so." Indeed, most of the saints were not physically robust. Saint Francis of Assisi had tuberculosis, and Saint Loyola was a cripple from the ravages of war. God said "No" to their pleas for healing. Most of God's saints have been poor. Indeed, I cannot think of a saint in all history who got rich being a saint. What is more, most of the saints were unpopular. Savonarola was burned at the stake, and John Hus and John Wycliffe suffered the same fate. So far as I can discover, there is nothing in the New Testament anywhere to suggest that Christian prayer, however devout, should make people completely healthy, wealthy or popular.

II

When God said "No" to Paul, the great apostle put two and two together and came up with the idea that his affliction could minister to his humility, as he said, "lest I be exalted above measure." Paul was eloquent and he was brilliant. He was a power in the early church, influential in its counsels. What is more, he had been a proud, unbending Pharisee, whose pride had gotten in the way of his spiritual insight and whose ego had jaundiced his perception of the will of God. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" served as a perpetual reminder of his spiritual need. He could not cure his affliction. Even Luke, the beloved physician who traveled so often with Paul, was impotent to heal his friend. No doubt Luke did what he could. So Paul faced the fact that he would have to bear his "thorn in the flesh" and let "the power of Christ rest upon" him to see him through.

Throughout his days Paul's "thorn in the flesh" made him acutely aware of his need for strength beyond his own. Without "the power of Christ" he could not manage the pain, and he knew it. Without unceasing prayer he would have to take to his bed, and leave hard toil to the healthy. He understood full well what Jesus meant when he said: "Without me, ye can do nothing." He put his feeling plainly when he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." On his own, he was whipped; with Christ, he was "more than conqueror."

Paul sensed the simple fact that we cannot be helped until we are humbled. What is more, he knew that humility is a difficult virtue when we are riding the crest of the wave. Healthy, wealthy and popular, we get along nicely without God; at least so it appears. In our self-sufficient arrogance we suspect that prayer is a device for the weak who cannot handle life by themselves. We have what it takes to make a go of life, and what can God do for us that we cannot do for ourselves with our wits and courage? We can run our business, support our families and get by very nicely, thank you, without bothering God. Let the weak lean on "the everlasting arms," we will just take a little aspirin for our headaches when we have them.

Like as not, we have to meet something we cannot manage before we get around to prayer and a decent reverence for God. We seldom look for help until we know we need it to survive. The student does not seek help with his studies until he knows that without it he will fail. He needed help all along, but he was too proud to admit it even to himself. The alcoholic cannot be helped until he knows he is finished without assistance from beyond himself. Usually he has to hit bottom before he can climb back with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous and God. The world is full of maladjusted people too proud to ask for help, so they blunder on to their miserable destiny. They will not look for help until they know they are lost without it.

Often we are like the man who was seen racing down a country road, running desperately to catch a train. He almost made it; but not quite. Panting at the station gate, he looked miserably at the station master, who remarked most unhelpfully, "Son, you just didn't start soon enough!" So it is with most of us. We get along nicely until we meet something we cannot manage, and then we discover we are totally unprepared to manage disaster and disappointment. We did not start soon enough to be ready for the unmanageable. We are left quite miserably on the station platform watching life go on without us.

Self-sufficient in health and economic plenty we do not bother about prayer, and then all unsuspecting we meet the unmanageable. It is a blow to our pride and like as not we rebel. "It isn't fair," we say petulantly, as if the God we utterly forgot should have kept us in mind. Of course, he has had us in mind all along, but we did not bother to find out about the love that never lets us go. We thought we did not need God. Then we met sickness or shattering sorrow or desperate failure, and learned the sober truth that we always needed God, never more than when we thought we were strong enough by ourselves.

Paul knew himself better than most men. Maybe that is why he thought he needed his "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble and responsive to the power of Christ. He might have gone off on a tangent, proud of himself and his accomplishments, and a bit condescending toward God. In any event, it is clear from the record that Paul looked upon his "thorn in the flesh" as a physical handicap that brought with it a spiritual blessing.

III

Certainly God's "No" to Paul's plea for healing was not a bare "No." God never says "No" to our pleas like tired parents who mean they do not wish to be bothered further. There is always a "Yea" that is linked to the "Nay," a road that is open beside the one that is closed. If there isn't full healing, at least there is help, and often some healing in the help. At least Paul found it so, for God's "No" ended with an affirmation: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Though Paul

could not be fully healed, he could have a compensating spiritual gift.

The author of the Seventy-third Psalm felt the truth when he considered his suffering and his tragic exile too. "My flesh and my heart faileth," he wrote, "but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Sick and homeless, yes, but still strong in God. was the experience of Katherine Mansfield, the gifted author who died in 1922 at the age of thirty-four, after a long struggle with disease. She wrote in her journal:

"I should like this to be accepted as my confession. There is no limit to human suffering. When one thinks: 'Now I have touched the bottom of the sea—now I can go no deeper, one does go deeper. I do not want to die without leaving a record of my belief that suffering can be overcome. For I do believe it. What must one do? Do not resist. Take it. Be overwhelmed. Accept it fully. Make it a part of life. Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become love. . . . I must pass from personal love to greater love."

And a little while later, pressing on through suffering to her work, she wrote: "May I be found worthy to do it! Lord, make me crystal clear for thy light to shine through."

So Paul accepted his "thorn in the flesh," and his suffering became love for mankind with the light of God 'shining through. So Katherine Mansfield accepted suffering, and her suffering became love, crystal clear for the light of God to shine through. What is more, by way of that light, her husband, John Middleton-Murry, an agnostic, saw so much of God that he became a priest of the Church of England. In one he loved dearly he saw the redeeming truth: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Let there be no mistake: Though there may be no healing, there always is help and power to use suffering creatively for the light of God to shine through.

Prayer in the face of our troubles or afflictions is not a matter of informing God of something he does not already know, or pleading with God to change his "No" to "Yes." Prayer is opening the soul to God so that he can point the way for us. "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of God's willingness." Paul gave up trying to overcome God's "No," and laid hold of God's "Yes." He listened for the answer to his plea for healing, and found it not in healing, but in help; not in cure but in creative courage. Out of the night of his pain came the word, "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The trouble we meet in our prayers lies in our failure to lay hold of God's willingness after we have felt the frustration of his reluctance to do what we want done. Yet some of the noblest Christians I have known have been men and women who dared to believe God could take the left-overs of their broken bodies and disappointed hopes and use them gloriously. I remember a schoolteacher, laid low by an incurable illness, but for ten long years she has sat in her room while hundreds of her former students trudge to her door to leave their troubles there. Radiant and cheerful, she has found the power of God to lift the burdens of others, and to inspire their faith in God. Even preachers have found a ministry of hope in her spirit; a glowing evidence of the truths they preach. God said "No" to her prayer for healing so she laid hold of God's willingness and let him take her life and use it as a bulwark for the souls of men to lean upon.

IV

There is one thing more that Paul learned when God said "No" to his prayer for healing. Said he: "When I am weak, then am I strong." His physical weakness became the source of his spiritual strength, and his spiritual strength overcame his physical affliction: I think Studdert-Kennedy, British poet and preacher, was the most striking illustration I ever saw of that truth. Years ago I heard him speak to some seven thousand young people at a convention in Indianapolis. His body was frail and emaciated, weakened by the ravages of tuberculosis, and he shuffled to the speaker's stand as if it were a gruesome effort. But when he spoke, there was an electric power in him, as if some hidden flame were burning bright. The light of God and the power of God used that frail, tortured body to stir seven thousand young people that day. In his weakness he was strong in the strength of God.

Such power does not just happen. Paul's strength in weakness did not just happen. It came from deep roots in the love and the goodness of God. You cannot pick strawberries from brambles, neither can you pick power from pessimism, or radiance from resentment. When God says "No" to what you want, remember that what you really need is not what you ask, but God himself, his strength for your weakness; his grace in your disappointment. Some day maybe we shall learn that the more we pray the better things go and the less we pray the worse they go. The more we lay hold of God's willingness, the less we are disturbed by his reluctance. The more we claim God's strength, the less we are worried by our weakness.

But finding God's strength for our weakness is by no means a casual matter, a Sunday excursion when something else does not interfere. It is a daily business and it seldom pays off on a regular schedule. "Pray without ceasing," said Jesus, and the psalmist adds a postscript: "If the vision tarry, wait for it." That is where we fail. Our prayers are mostly afterthoughts, not the common mood of every hour at work and at home. What is more, we have no wish to wait. As John Wesley noted, "The difference between God and me is that I am in a hurry and God is not." We want answers to our prayers at once, or else we just quit praying.

There is a hint of our mood in the comment of a lad at a young people's meeting. Said he: "Let's make the devotions snappy and get on with the program." So we want to be on with our program with no time to wait to lay hold of God's program for us. We want healing now, not tomorrow or the next day. We cannot manage to wait. It is only another illustration of the pride that keeps us from the power of God. We

want to manage God and his will, God and his timetable. If he does not dance to our tune we won't believe in him, and that's that.

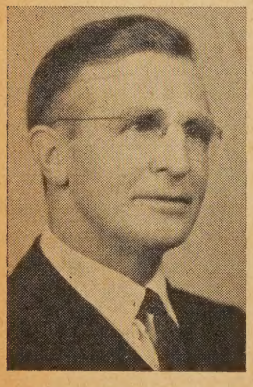
Paul knew better. He spent a year in Arabia praying and thinking. Every letter he wrote breathed the spirit of prayer. He prayed on the roads he traveled, in the prisons where he waited, on the ships he sailed, in the homes where he paused. He knew he could manage his "thorn in the flesh" with God; but he could not carry on alone. He knew he could keep on with the strength of God girding his weakness. He could not keep going alone. So it is with you and with me. We can manage our ills with God, and keep sweet; but we are done on our own. We can take pain and hurt in our stride if we know God's "strength is made perfect in weakness."

The Testimony of Time

By CARADOC JAMES MORGAN

There is no new thing under the sun. Ecclesiastes 1:9.

WE ARE being taught today to think of life in terms of progress. But to Koheleth, of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the term progress, as we understand it, was wholly unknown. The prevailing thought of his day was that the best in life had happened, and consequently belonged to the past. This was also the contemporary thought in the Greek and Roman worlds. Theirs was an age of going back—"to the glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome." With an allegiance so strong to the past, together with an unchanging knowledge that the best had happened, the statement that "there is no new thing under the sun" should not be considered too absurd or strange when interpreted in the thought of the age which produced it.



OUR CHANGED WORLD

What a different world is ours! With our thinking influenced by the evolutionary idea, we naturally think of life in terms of growth, and of subsequent changes. With this thought in mind, let us assume that an imaginary arrangement has been made for Koheleth to visit our city of Portland. Needless to say, he would find it very much unlike the world he knew. From what we know of his generation, he found himself in a world where human slavery was a thoroughly established social custom. There were marked limitations in political and social freedom. Public health, accident prevention, child welfare were not thought of in terms of clinics, bureaus and institutions. The multiplication of the service side of our life, together with the social, political, economic and moral changes of our generation, should compel an admission, at least in our estimation, that there are many new things under the sun.

There need be no question regarding the differences of our world from the one Koheleth knew. We have made tremendous material progress in changing our standards of living and the appearances of our environment. And there is reason to believe that our imaginary visitor would be sufficiently courteous and sensible enough to recognize such evident physical improvements. But after appreciatively listening to all we would have to say of our bigger and supposedly better world, we should not be surprised to hear him respond with a challenging reply somewhat as follows:

KOHELETH EXPLAINS

"Yes, your world is so much unlike the one in which I spent my days, so far as outward appearances are concerned. Your mines and mills, fields and forests, marts of trade and centers of learning; your railroads and highways, airways and waterways, tunnels and skyscrapers are to the human eye evidence of power and progress. But is there not a danger of thinking of these changes in terms of perfection? Remember, disease makes progress, but it does not make perfection. Crime makes progress, but not perfection. Fire makes progress, but not perfection. After all, is not perfection measured more by the eternal goodness of the human heart rather than by the creative ability of the mind? I have seen enough to convince me that while your methods of living are vastly different from what I knew, yet the elemental and fundamental needs of man were the same in my age as they are in yours. Really, when I said there is no new thing under the sun, it deserves at least some further thought before rejecting it as absurd.

"Let me ask what I consider another important question: How much have the needs of man changed in his search for a satisfactory conception and abiding consciousness of God? I have already observed that the approach to the question, and the methods used in the search, differ, but the human need is just the same. My generation was concerned in working out a philosophy which would give meaning to our problem of living just as you are trying to find a satisfactory philosophy for the same reason. The methods used in developing our respective philosophies are not the same, but the ends sought are alike. The quest of my

people was for happiness, as it is for yours. We craved human brotherhood as you do, and to us the preservation of human life was just as sweet. The sun that shines on you is the same that shone on my people. The sea upon which I sailed to visit you is the same sea I knew as a boy. The moon and stars you have shown me from your conservatories are the same I saw during the night watches in the fields. The mountains you have tunneled were created the same time as the ones I climbed when a lad. The earth which has been made so fertile and productive in food for you is the same earth that satisfied my hunger. I have observed your joys and sorrows, your pains and pleasures, your smiles and tears, and they are much the same as my people experienced. There is a sameness in creation's story in each succeeding age, and my statement, which seems strange to you, is still sensible to me, as I now see how little we differ in the agelong quest for the supreme objectives of life."

TIME IS THE JUDGE

Imaginary though this interview may be, its conclusions are worthy of serious consideration. In the last analysis, we know that time is the judge of what is transient and permanent. In this respect it is unalterable in its verdict on the question of progress. The testimony of time is that the safe and sure way to evaluate progress is by human experience. We know that it is one thing to judge progress in terms of concrete and steel, robots and radio, jet-propulsion and atomic energy, and it is another thing to think of it in terms of character and soul. No one can say authoritatively what the discoveries of today can or will do for the salvation of the present generation, but there is every reason to believe that the character of this age will decide its destiny. Character is always the deciding factor in the evaluation of progress. That which the hand of man creates lasts only as long as time permits, but that which the soul conceives embraces eternity.

Progress is forever scrapping that which was once considered permanent. The inventions of one age are obsolete in another. We are no longer dependent upon yesterday's methods for today's successes. In the field of material accomplishment there is considerable progress but little permanence. "Change and decay in all around I see" is as truthful a statement of fact as is "Two times two are four."

UNALTERABLE VALUES

Let us not err in mistaking activity for achievement. Merely to say, "We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way," is an uncertain course to follow, and perhaps will ultimately be very disappointing. Let us give Koheleth a little more credit for his serious deliberations than we have been accustomed to give him. Who knows but that in a reflective mood he saw with the mind's eye the procession of the ages, and in that panorama of human events saw that life has certain definite values, and that these values are unalterable regardless of the changes to which they are subjected? True, Koheleth seems to tip the scales more on the side of pessimism than optimism. But what is more important is that his predictions have all the evidence on his side regarding the unchanging nature of the eternal in relation to the supreme ends of life.

Years later than the times of Koheleth a greater teacher expressed the same truth: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." Jesus had faith in the permanency of the essential things of life. So much so, that he had no fear for the future of what he said, and made no provision to preserve his teachings in written form. He was content to leave his truth in the hearts of those with whom he associated, believing that his spoken word had eternal and abiding value. We today, looking backward, see the changes to which his truth has been subjected. It has been dogmatized, institutionalized, ecclesiastized. It has been expressed in creed, doctrine, ritual, ceremony. But with all these uses and abuses its eternal values stand impregnable. There is nothing new under the sun. The truth Jesus taught in Galilee is the same truth needed today. New occasions may call for new expressions of it, but its inherent and unchanging quality will ever remain the same. That which is eternal in its truthfulness and final in its values is beyond the power of man or time to change.

THE CHANGELESS CHRIST

The finality of all truth centers in the person of Jesus Christ. How close to the full realization of this fact the writer of the letter to the Hebrews comes when he says: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." These are words with an overwhelming positiveness of the unexcelled personity of Jesus. After nineteen centuries of time and change the world was never more in need of such an absolute conviction regarding his message and leadership. Through the ages systems have been devised, philosophies created, doctrines demanded, and symbols used as means and methods of interpretation, but all these have yet to express the full meaning of the majesty and uniqueness of Christ.

> Our little systems have their day;
> They have their day and cease to be;
> They are but broken lights of thee,
> And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

The lesson we need to learn from Koheleth, and from Jesus, is that they were not obscurantists who were opposed to the thought of material progress. While the concept of progress did not have the same connotation for them as it has for us, they were wise enough to see and know that man's chief concern, in whatever age he lives, must not center in the momentary affairs of the present, but in the essentials of eternity. Both Koheleth and Jesus knew that life on this earth is not an end in itself, but that from the dawn of time, when God breathed into man the breath of life, eternity has found a place in the human heart. With this divine heritage life is given new proportions, and these proportions are best realized when man thinks and acts in terms of eternity. One of our greatest undertakings today is to recover our lost sense of eternity.

Our Refuge in Dark Days

By BINNEY SIMPSON BLACK

When my spirit is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Psalm 61:2.

THE BIBLE is like a skillful singer who can vary his style and change his subjects to suit any company which he happens to meet. To those who are in joy the Bible allots appropriate passages, and it has an equally suitable and precious store of truths for those who are in sorrow. On one page we find truth for the simplest mind, and on another wisdom flows in a stream so deep that the greatest intellect could swim in it. Now we can attend to the grave narratives of history, then we listen to the unearthly sounds of the prophet's harp, and again we read the familiar correspondence of the inspired apostles. Very often the stores of experience are opened, as in the passage before us, and we are free to select the topics that best suit our own feelings, and so make the language of others common property. As for the Book of Psalms, that brings us down to bedrock in experience, and as a pure experience of God the Psalms are unmatched. "In passing from page to page of this book," said Joseph Parker, "we pass as it were through the aisles of a temple, or through solemn cloisters where men are engaged in prayer."

"When my spirit is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." We can only conjecture what gave rise to these words. No doubt they were written in the anticipation of some approaching sorrow or in the vivid recollection of some recent distress. We purpose to use them as our own, and to consider, first, the condition referred to, and second, the psalmist's request.

WHEN RELIGION FAILS TO COMFORT

First, let us look at the condition referred to.

"My spirit is overwhelmed." It is a sad but well-known fact that God's people are by no means as happy as their creed is expected to make them. It is certain that if anything can sweeten the strange mixture in the cup of human life, it must be religion. For it is religion that meets our deepest needs and introduces us to the life of faith. It is religion that makes us look up to a higher power and seek a higher fellowship. It is religion that gives serenity of mind, that keeps one brave and cool in days when things go wrong and the hearts of many are anxious and afraid. We Christians believe that Christianity is the true religion, with a fullness of truth and power which other religions do not have. We believe that if any heart is to have the "peace that passeth all understanding," it must be that which has welcomed the truth "as truth is in Jesus." Nothing can bless where this fails to impart peace. How irreligious people manage to face life I do not know. If the balm which grows on Calvary does not heal every wound, in vain do we seek a cure from any other application. But still, though this is the case, many sincere Christians are often found unsatisfied and comfortless and can honestly exclaim with the psalmist, "My spirit is overwhelmed."

How can we account for this circumstance so generally and painfully prevalent? How is it that when "all things work together for good to them that love God," so many things have power to shake our confidence and to give to the goodly edifice of faith the aspect of a ruin? How is it that when the New Testament presents to us a precept such as this, "Rejoice in the Lord always," and gives us abundant help at the same time to observe it—how is it that we are so often found disconsolate and fainthearted?

SOME TRIALS OF CHRISTIANS

It is because on every side of our nature and life we find so much that is depressing. You have seen the glossy look of insincere profession. You have watched the mine of envy. You have been scorched by the fire of hell which burns on the tongue of slander. Pride has looked down on you with the contemptuous sneer that is not easily forgotten. Anger has drawn his sword in your face, and treachery has lurked to shoot an arrow in the dark against your life.

The pressure of present duties is often burdensome, and the future looms up with painful prospects. Bodily affliction often overwhelms, and nature shrinks from the accompaniments of sickness. Pain makes courage itself a coward. Family trials often oblige us to say, "My spirit is overwhelmed." An evil son or daughter may grow up to be the shame and anguish of those who have looked on their growing years with proud and pleasurable hope. Children for whom instruction, example and prayer have put forth their choicest efforts may afford no indication of real goodness.

Then there is the church of our Lord and Savior. The cause of truth, righteousness and human salvation may seem to be languishing. The Communion of Saints is deficient in fraternal love, in the spirit of prayer, zeal and exertion. Discord often breaks in on the harmony of Christians with harsh and jarring notes. Pride and vanity and worldliness abound in many hearts where the graces of the Spirit ought to reign. Surely the Christian may feel inclined to say, "My spirit is overwhelmed."

A sense of guilt, too, may often oppress one. Every

fresh conviction of our own moral weakness, and we feel anew our basic need of God's forgiveness, and his help to make us pure and good, with that inward witness that we are acceptable in his sight.

Sometimes, too, the fear of death makes the Christian sad. There is something in our nature that shudders at the thought of the last hour—dissolution, the funeral, the cold grave. And the thought of eternity, the fate of the soul when summoned from the flesh, arrays the moment when life expires in such tremendous and awful sublimity.

'LEAD ME TO THE ROCK'

So much for the condition referred to in our text. Let us now attend to *the psalmist's request.*

"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." The writer seems to picture a high rock on the landscape. It is a place of security high above the assaults of the enemy. This shelter and security is God. He tells us in the psalm that in the past he has found refuge in God; so he likens God to a rock. In Psalm 62 we have a similar reference:

> My soul waiteth in silence for God only:
> From him cometh my salvation.
> He only is my rock and my salvation:
> He is my high tower; I shall not be greatly moved.

Also in Psalm 31:

> Be thou to me a strong rock,
> A house of defence to save me.
> For thou art my rock and my fortress.

Some of the most striking imagery of the Bible is based upon rocks. They are a symbol of God, the God who affords a retreat from every sorrow and a sure defense from every foe. However sad our experience, God must be our recourse. To him we must fly in times of danger and distress, for in vain do we look to any inferior object.

Human nature cannot help itself in times of deep and dark perplexity. It is fortunate that we have a Rock rising above our fellows, a Rock of Ages, a higher stay and strength than all the substitutes for God such as wealth, comfort, pleasure, learning, friendship and other "miserable comforters." The God we need must be other and higher than man. How prone we are lightly to esteem, as Israel did of old, this Rock of everlasting strength to which the psalmist prays he may be guided. Hence we are often surprised by our foes and robbed of our peace. We seem to be their prey and property, and our spirit is overwhelmed.

OUR ONLY HOPE

But—"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." This is the prayer to make with persevering earnestness. Pray that you may be led to exercise in a more decided and practical manner faith in the character and intention of the God who is revealed in the Bible as a God of love, who "delighteth in mercy." Here is our only hope. It is the God revealed in Jesus, who walks by our side amid the sin and misery of our modern world and speaks the healing word that was a balm in Palestine long ago—"Come unto Me, all you toiling and burdened ones, and I will give you rest." You may appear to get along without him in the little annoyances of life. But life will not always be made up of little troubles that pass with the day. The spray will give place to huge billows that buffet you and threaten to take the breath and the life out of you. This will be the test.

I know something about life. There are mysteries that confuse us and heart-staggering things that make us hold our breath. It seems at times as if the only refuge is despair. Like you, I too have been puzzled and shaken. But because I have the God of Jesus, my feet are on the solid rock and my eyes see clearly enough. In the Light of the World I can pick my way. God's presence, his love and his power, are my shelter in the time of storm, the cure for helplessness and fear. Humanity will be sick and weary until it turns away from false comforters and is revived by promises plentiful as the sands of the sea. And God's Word is unrestrained in offering these. Why cannot our confidence be as unlimited as the testimony on which it should be built?

WHAT GOD CAN DO TO HELP

Two things chiefly God engages to do in favor of the overwhelmed. He promises to make the present life a new thing, full of hope and courage and helpfulness, lived in the love and service of God and of one's fellow men. And we are assured that death cannot end what life here has begun. Belief in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a pledge of the triumph of everything that is good and true and beautiful and worth while. If you are led to this high Rock you may look down with something of sublime indifference on the day when everything seems to go wrong. Why should the past, the present and the future grieve or alarm when God has promised to support in every duty, to sanctify every event, and give us life in its fullest and grandest meaning, life for evermore?

The body is often a troublesome companion. But it will one day be deserted and a form of immortal health and beauty fashioned after the glorious likeness of Christ will become the perfect abode of a perfected spirit. "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body," the soul's perfect instrument, appropriate to the future state.

'HID WITH CHRIST IN GOD'

But all this is for the soul that is "hid with Christ in God." Everything is yours if you stand on the Rock of Ages. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Fear cannot now appall with visions of "the wrath to come." If in the providence of God his departure is at hand, why should the Christian fear to depart, for that is "to be with Christ," which St. Paul declares "is far better." The bed of dissolution is often soft as heavenly love and hope can make it. The Christian who has been a coward ere the time of battle with "the last enemy" has often been a hero at its approach and has conquered all its terrors with a smile. In the neighborhood of the grave the eye

is favored with visions which are not of this world. Heaven then unveils part of its beauty, something of the sunshine and the singing and the splendor of the Great Beyond.

When the trials of life or the fears of death weigh down your spirit, may this prayer be answered: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." But to make fully certain of that experience, God must be our God when the skies are smiling. The tool in daily use is never lost, and the God whose presence is practiced daily is a God near at hand when we need him most.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.

Spite-Fences

A Sermon for Children by Lewis H. Davis

ALL Juniors know what a fence is, but some may not know what a spite-fence is. When someone doesn't like his neighbor, he builds a fence between his house and his neighbor's so the neighbor or the neighbor's children can't come into his yard. If he can't even stand the sight of his neighbor he sometimes builds it so high they can't see each other. Such a fence is called a spite-fence.

There was once a man—call him Mr. Smith—who didn't like his neighbor—call him Mr. Jones. Now it so happened that their houses were very close together. Mr. Smith couldn't make Mr. Jones move away, and Mr. Jones himself didn't want to move. So he built a spite-fence.

And it *was* a spite-fence. It would have taken a bulldozer to push it over. It was made of bricks. It looked more like a fort than a wall. Mr. Smith built it very high, so Mr. Jones could not climb over. Then, to make sure Mr. Jones did not even try to climb over, Mr. Smith broke up some old bottles, picked out the sharpest, jaggedest pieces and, when the cement on top of the wall was still soft, stuck them close together in a long row on top of the wall, sharp end up.

To everyone who walked by the wall the snarling teeth seemed to say: "I, Mr. Smith, hate my neighbor, Mr. Jones. If he tries to climb this wall I will bite him with these sharp teeth." It seemed a little silly, for there was no fence in front of either house. If Mr. Jones really wanted to come into Mr. Smith's yard he could have walked up the front walk where there wasn't any wall.

WHAT THE SPITE-FENCE SAID

Not long after the wall with the glass teeth was finished Mr. Jones moved away. But the big wall with the glass teeth remained and kept saying: "I, Mr. Smith, hate my neighbor, Mr. Jones."

It sounded very silly, for Mr. Jones wasn't there to hear it. He was gone. Nobody lived in the house, so nobody heard it except the other neighbors who already knew it.

Then one day a strange thing happened. A new family moved into the empty house—call them the Browns—and they happened to be friendly with Mr. Smith. That was unfortunate, for here was Mr. Smith's spite-fence still saying: "I hate my neighbor. I hate my neighbor," when he didn't hate him at all.

But the wall was so high and so thick and cost so much money to build, Mr. Smith didn't like to take it down, even if it kept saying what he didn't mean.

After a long time Mr. Smith couldn't stand the wall, so he got a stepladder and a hammer and tried to knock the glass teeth out of his spite-fence. But he had put them in so well he couldn't make a good job of it. So he hired workmen, who brought their sledges and chisels. They lowered the wall five or six feet so it was no longer a spite-fence, but just a plain fence. What a job it was!

MENTAL SPITE-FENCES

Sometimes we build spite-fences in our minds. Not brick and cement ones with snarling glass teeth, but real ones nevertheless. We sometimes say to ourselves: "I don't like Bill, or Mary, or John. I won't have anything to do with them. I don't even want to like them!" When we've said that, we've built a spite-fence between ourselves and them.

Spite-fences are not only silly things, they are also very expensive. They not only cost money and time and hard work but they cost friendship, peace of mind and self-respect. Even a millionaire can't afford one!

I do not know what started the bad feeling between Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones. Sometimes very little sparks can start very big fires. How much better it would have been if, in the spirit of good will, they had found a better way to settle their differences!

Jesus once said, "Love your enemies." Get even with them, not by building spite-fences, but by loving them. Spite-fences never work. Love is the only thing that works. Love your enemies.

THE POWER of prayer has never been tried to its full capacity in any church. If we want to see mighty wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let the whole church answer God's standing challenge: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not!"

J. HUDSON TAYLOR.

We Believe in the Church

By HAROLD A. BOSLEY

HOW many times have you heard people say that they believe in religion but not in the church? Most people who make this assertion, I dare say, would be insulted if you were to point out that that is like saying that they believe in love but not in marriage and the home. But without intending any insult at all, the plain fact should be pointed out that one basic ethical principle underlies both assertions. Here is that principle: They believe in all of the privileges implicit in the emotion but in none of the responsibilities implicit in its fulfillment.

Our generation believes in religion in a vague sort of way. We want to enjoy its assurance of the essential worthfulness of human life; the essential goodness of what we in our highest moments try to do. We want to believe that there is a far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves. We want to believe that our limited fleeting lives somehow count for good. We want to face the anxieties and tragedies of life, strengthened by the assurance of the reality of God and his concern for us and our welfare. Wanting and needing these fruits of vital religion, we as a generation simply take them from the Christian tradition which has brought them to us without so much as a thank you to the church which has nurtured and carried that tradition for two thousand years. You would think, wouldn't you? that elemental gratitude would prompt us to recognize our dependence upon the church for these fruits of vital religion.

Yet, perhaps, we in the church have been as much to blame for the apathy of our generation toward the church as any other one factor. I think it of tremendous importance that we try to put our convictions about the church in terms of contemporary facts, not in terms simply of hallowed tradition. We are not now seeking to praise the church; we are trying to understand it. Consequently, I am going to put a number of facts about the church in an order which will commend them and it to thoughtful people everywhere.

I

The first fact about the church is this: The church is a religious institution for the perpetuation of a religious tradition. Religion is not a free land affair. Religion is not a private matter. It is intensely personal, to be sure, but not therefore private. It is as completely social as we human beings are. The church is the institution which has gathered together the luminous insights of various spiritual giants through the ages and welded them into a body of belief and conviction which has passed from one generation to another with cumulative conviction. Without the institution working at this business through the centuries, these luminous insights would have perished long ago.

The Christian faith has always expressed itself through not one but many different forms of social organizations. No one form of the church has been able to commend itself as the final form of the church to thoughtful people. All are in process of development. All are seeking to stick to their central purpose which has been put in these words: "It is the business of the church to make God real to every generation." I should like to amend this to read: "It is the business of the Christian church to make the will of God as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ real to every generation."

II

The second fact about the church is this: "It is the nucleus of fellowship." It is the business of the church to make people feel at home, not in a superficial sense but in the deep and abiding sense of finding peace in the fellowship which we have one with another. It is the business of the church to see to it that the kind of fellowship exists within the organization which enables people to share their joys and find them heightened and share their sorrows and find them lightened. Unless there is that kind of fellowship within the church, it is failing to achieve one of its highest goals. It is no accident, I think, that the Methodist Church has always stressed fellowship as being more important than creed, and experience as being more important than doctrinal uniformity. Let us hope we never forget to put first things first!

III

A third factor about the church is this: It is a religious communion.

To say that the church is a communion distinguishes it at once from any other kind of social institution. The church is the disciples listening to the Sermon on the Mount, or following Jesus along the roadways of Palestine, or breaking bread with him. It is the disciples waiting for the visitation of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It is Peter and his comrades eyeing the leaders of Judaism and saying, "We must obey God rather than men!" It is Martin Niemoeller and his brethren in the Confessional Church defying Hitler through the wire of the concentration camps. It is Kagawa keeping the spirit of the Christian group in Japan alive during the desperate days of the war. It is the mother, who, reflecting on the death of her only son in the war, said: "I don't hate anybody for this. I don't want the man

killed who killed him because I don't want anyone else to suffer as we have." Wherever men's lives are made luminous by the light of God as seen in Jesus Christ, there is the church.

The church must confront men with the fact of the living God. The church must make this fact real in terms not alone of vision but also of judgment and light shed on the road ahead. We are supposed to be, to borrow Alfred Noyes' famous phrase, "The light bearers of mankind." The light we bear was lighted not by human hands, but it must be borne by human hands into every dark corner of the world, including our own hearts.

When we say we believe in the church we are believing in this kind of realistic, absolutely necessary, social institution. Only the man who believes that the insights of religion have been neither wrong nor futile can safely and honorably stand outside the church. We who stand inside the church must not be lulled into complacency by that fact. There is work to be done; there are criticisms to be raised; there are institutional policies to be corrected; there are new directions to be taken; there are new missions to be supported.

The church is not a doddering old institution basking in the sunset light of hallowed glory; it is an aggressive, alert leader of the thought and the lives of men as they try to build a new and better world than men have ever known before.

Unpublished Sermons

HUNDREDS of thousands of young people have graduated this year and are going out to find their life and work. Their world is different from that which greeted graduates of fifty years ago. That was a world of hope. Science was annihilating distance. "We believed that life had made progress, that the world was a better world than our fathers had known, and that it would be better still." There remained only one great autocrat, the czar of Russia, who was considered an anachronism. But now—

When Faith Fails

WILLIAM E. BROOKS retired from First Presbyterian Church, Morgantown, W. Va., a year ago, but went back this year to preach the Baccalaureate sermon at the University. He delivered a message on the text, "If the Lord be God, follow him." (I Kings 18:21) It is a message good for any time. Telling of world conditions at the time he graduated, Mr. Brooks holds up the world of today, and asks, Why? At that time of hope, he points out, "the poison distilled by the philosophers of the 18th Century Enlightenment had spread over the Western world." The fact of God was questioned, and man's worth. God began to die in the world of man, and now Edna Millay says in her play, "Man has never been the same since God died."

Here is today's picture: According to the N. B. C. survey, only 51 per cent of the people of the U. S. own any religious affiliation. In Britain, 46 per cent believe in a personal God. In Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland and Finland 20 per cent admit no religious belief; in France, 35. This loss of faith has been followed by the loss of morals. Toynbee of Oxford holds the Enlightenment responsible for all this; it did away with God, and told man his reason could solve his problems. Now Churchill testifies: "The flame of Christian ethics is still our highest guide." Churchill is a historian, and here is proof from history that "when faith comes back in a swelling tide, vast changes come with it." The Great Awakening of 200 years ago was a turning point, and through it the American nation was born. Into the wilderness, where "there was a great decay as to the power and life of godliness," where there was drunkenness, low morality, little decency, there came the Godly dreams of the Fathers. The Revelation was not the child of Rousseau, with his "Rights of Man," but of the older tradition of religion. And our one great need today is to get back to those early ideals. And that is the challenge to the thousands of youth who are now taking up the torch.

It is not enough to say: "I am a Christian. I believe in God." But, warns Mr. Brooks: "Have you the idea of God present in life, sharing your life, that some of you had in those hours spent in foxholes?" Recurring to the old story of the Book of Kings, the speaker said: "That story is being re-enacted today. Around us is the struggle which Israel knew—between Baal and the Eternal God of justice and right. The new Baal is just the old Baal in a proletarian garb—sensual, cruel, degrading."

Going out today, young people are reminded of John Buchan's remark concerning the Battle of Actium: "The riddle of Actium was not in the details of the fighting, but in the minds of the combatants." That is still true. "What a man thinks, what motives sway him, these give him power or cause him to falter. What is in your mind —what ideas possess it, what motives guide, as you take your place in the world struggle? Above all, what place is there for God?"

'We Have Everything'—But . . .

RETURNING from a nine weeks' tour of the British Isles, and having participated in the life of those war-battered people, WILLIAM WARD AYER, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, New York, came back to America conscious of our many possessions, both material and spiritual. He preached a sermon with the text I Cor. 3:22-3, closing "all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

1. Americans need a new view of the goodness and greatness of life's opportunities of our God-blessed land. Food, ample clothing, opportunities not only to help ourselves but also the world—these are some of our blessings. Our four freedoms are even more precious. But all these are vain "if we do not have God and salvation through Christ." Religion is spoken of as something that limits one—a circumscribed existence. But, said Paul, "all things are yours." Christianity enlarges life.

2. The church is the world's greatest institution and the true Christian is the most blessed person on earth. But Paul was writing to a quarreling church, and that same spirit is with us today. People do not see that God deals not in trivialities but in great universals. "I have come that they might have life"—abundant life. Americans need to change their attitude toward the church. It is not something to use and abuse according to one's temperament. It was given for our salvation and training in Christian things. Back of it are centuries of consecrated lives, and in the church these saints—and God—are speaking to men. Through the church life is ours; let us not squander it "but invest it in high and holy things." As Christians, death is also ours, but "death that Christ has made a servant of those who trust him."

3. All things are ours, but we belong to another, even Christ. Paul makes that plain; for if all things were ours without the controlling power of Christ, we would misuse our possessions as the world has done. The world is

a prodigal; it has taken its all and gone into a far country and spent its substance in riotous living. As Christians, we must recognize that we are not our own; we are bought with a price. We must give our hearts and lives to Christ, then through him all things are given to us.

"We have been led to think of the fact that in America we have everything. To go beyond that fact and realize that the Christian has all things as the very gift of God is worthy of deep meditation."

Communism

RALPH THEODORE HAAS, of Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church, Plainfield, N. J., makes no apology for discussing communism in the pulpit, for "it is not merely a political movement but a movement with profound spiritual implications and repercussions as well." It was not born in Russia, but in western Europe. Its animus against religion can be explained only by the fact that communism is a dynamic faith which is intrinsically religious. "It has become a truism to say that you cannot overcome a rival faith with force. Therefore we are constrained to understand the communist idea and to meet it with intelligence and candor."

Taking as his title, "Communism—Menace or Challenge?" Mr. Haas points out that communism is an interpretation of human history. It affirms that history can be understood only in the light of economics. Religion, morality, culture, ideals are but by-products of the economic process. Moreover, the communist is convinced that history is on his side. "It is this utopianism which gives communism its dynamic power; this belief that from the welter of class conflict there will be created the perfect community." To be sure, the communist glibly explains the necessity for the "proletarian dictatorship" at the present time: it will serve only as the "midwife" for the new society.

Today we see a struggle between two philosophies born in England in the 17th century: that of Hobbes, with his all-powerful state, and that of Locke, with his watchword, "Freedom."

Let us recognize the achievements of communism in Russia. Note the heroism at Stalingrad, a symbol of the tenacious courage of the Russian people. The industrial progress and material achievements of Russia, in spite of a destructive war, are to be noted. The universal appeal of communism cannot be overlooked. "It is a world faith with a global strategy."

But what praise can be given a movement which meets its dissenters with animus and hostility? (The communist justifies this hostility between classes as birth pains that will disappear when the New Order is born.)

Communism is thus seen to be the champion of a "New Order." But is democracy a static thing with its injustices a permanent feature of its life? Do we not also believe in progress, in a "New Order"? Can we not face the "false doctrine" of communism, with its evident enthusiasm, with a vigorous movement for true democracy? We must long live with the communists as neighbors, and we must be alert. "Insofar as communism is a menace, it must be met with firmness and strength. That is a task for the diplomat and military."

But let us not treat communism solely as a menace. It is a challenge to our Christian faith and to our democratic way of life. We too are the custodians of a revolutionary gospel! Let us say to our men of business: "You who are so fearful of the communist menace, are you equally responsive to its challenge? By your zeal you have given us this economic system of ours. It took brains and faith and courage to achieve this. But your job is not finished. You must dedicate these brains not to the service of self but to the common good. You must make this system of ours work with a fairer justice. The hopes of men the world around who cherish their heritage of freedom rest upon you."

If we respond to that great task with fortitude born of

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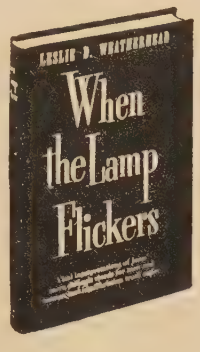

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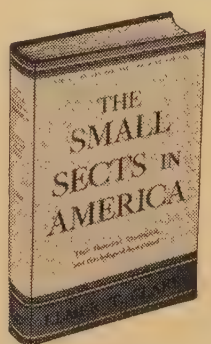

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the Christian faith, the communist menace will be shorn of its claws and the communist challenge will be met and overcome.

Secret of Endurance

TAKING as his text Heb. 11:27—"for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible"—EDWARD W. STIMSON, of Knox Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, considers the example of Moses who, in the Egyptian court, in the desert, then as military commander, prime minister and judge, and as leader of a rebellious people—endured. Using the sermon title, "The Secret of Endurance," Mr. Stimson points out four ways in which Moses learned to go on and conquer in the face of untoward circumstances.

An integrated personality. "As seeing Him who is invisible," Moses unified his life with singleness of purpose. Thus being relieved of inner strains, he had great powers of endurance. "By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." His life was right with God. He thus had the peace of God which a good conscience gives.

Acceptance of self-limitation. Moses delegated responsibility—appointed rulers over thousands and over hundreds and over fifties, as he was told to do. And God had said, "I will be with thee." The great leader, moreover, "had to trust God's Providence . . . in a world where no man can do it all, where the moral law is universal but where some imperfection is inevitable."

Inspiration of divine calling. Moses was sustained by the enthusiasm of an inspiring cause. Through his long experience in the wilderness he learned to cooperate with God's purpose to establish a free people. "One of the reasons people lack endurance is that they fail to relate their work to the Kingdom of God."

Power through prayer. Moses' great vision, renewed by frequent prayer, his face aglow with the light of God's presence, gave him power to bear incredible burdens. God carried the heavy end of the load. God gives resources of strength to those who pray and trust him.

A Pastoral Prayer

By HERBERT BEECHER HUDNUT

OUR Father God, we need to pray today, to feel that Thou art near, to gain strength from Thy presence, to know the blessing of Thy love, to share in the communion of the Saints, and to hear the Savior's words, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

We pray for forgiveness—for sins committed in the past, the sins of violence and hatred, of prejudice and pride, of indolence and sloth, of arrogance and covetousness. God have mercy on us, for we are all sinners, and Thou alone canst forgive.

We pray for patience—to endure the punishment for our misdeeds—unwearied patience in reclaiming the lost and rebuilding a shattered world, and the patience to understand unanswered prayer.

We pray for courage—for the night is long and our burdens are heavy, and we grow fainthearted at the long, long way we must travel. God give us courage to build the Holy City here in our homeland, and then to fare forth to braver deeds in the lands where the Way of Christ is not known to all men. Help us to create a new era of understanding, a new spiritual commonwealth, that wars and fightings may cease all over the world.

We pray for insight—to solve the difficult questions before the United Nations and the Congress of the United States, to produce a better citizenship in State and City, and to decrease the tension between groups of people, caused by their work or race or creed.

We pray for Thy compassion—to touch the sick and to heal them, to comfort the sorrowing, to supply the needs of the aged and infirm, to restore those who are mentally ill, to feed and clothe the starving and dispossessed, and to answer the prayers of little children.

And we pray for hope. Grant that all men everywhere may know the Risen Christ who said, "Go ye into all the world, to redeem the world, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

In the Master's Name we pray. Amen.

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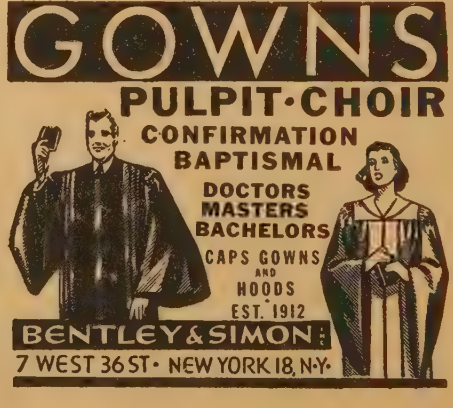


Mousetraps and Sermons

By GEORGE LAWRENCE PARKER

ACCORDING to Mrs. S. B. Yule in her book *Borrowings,* published in 1889, Emerson really did say, "If a man builds a better mousetrap or preaches a better sermon than anyone else, the world will make a hard-beaten path to his door." Literary experts have found reason to doubt the full correctness of the famous saying, declaring it to be a rather perverse version of a genuine paragraph in his *Journals* as follows: "If a man has good corn, or wood, or boards, or pigs, to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or church organs than anybody else, you will find a broad hard-beaten path to his house, though it be in the woods."

● *A Pertinent Figure*

But the mousetrap figure of speech has caught our fancy and our quoting abilities, and with Mrs. Yule's backing I find it quite Emersonian enough to command my credibility. It is a homiletic vitamin.

At any rate, if we look carefully into the matter the mousetrap and the sermon are at least first cousins. Each is a device to catch something and each fails if its catching quality is inefficient. The mousetrap would save men from loss and destruction wrought by a small but inveterate and insidious enemy. The sermon would save man from the gnawings and nibblings of his own hidden rebellious spirit, and also from the giant enemies that a hostile world brings up against him.

● *Sin, Too, Can Be Trapped*

"The little cares that fret us" and the Goliaths that confront us are equally destructive. Sin, in large form or small teasing shapes, easily drives off most of our frontal attacks. But when we trap it, it can do nothing but surrender. When we prove that righteousness, in the face of all of life's known facts, is smarter than evil, evil can do nothing but hoist the white flag. This is why we need moral discipline as well as high religious emotion.

In preaching there is a sacred guile which is stronger than our thunderbolts, a consecrated trapping process mightier than our logic or our eloquence, a grace of speech and tone and method more magnetic than any elocution. And this is based on sound foundations, for someone has recently pointed out that our compelling phrase, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," universalized by Paul, is more truly translated by the words, "The persuasion of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the grace of God" may be turned more fittingly into "the persuasion of God." I have found by hours of comparison that the suggested new forms are in all cases possible and enlightening. A new light shines out of the proposed change, strengthening but not abandoning the old translation.

G. L. PARKER

If it be not too extravagant, we may almost say that the entire gospel is nothing but Jesus' new way of telling men that God's persuasiveness is greater than his bare power, his influence by love and reason greater than his autocracy or totalitarianism. In quite human terms we may say that the grace of God is never awkward. It is all-powerful because it wins, traps, enchants the souls of men by its inviolable subtlety, its perfect artistry, its commanding reasonableness, its overwhelming attraction, and its symphonic appeal. It is thus found in most of the Psalms, and Francis Thompson has expressed it in that greatest of all modern psalms, "The Hound of Heaven":

> I tempted all his servitors but to find
> My own betrayal in their constancy;
> In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
> Their traitorous trueness and their loyal deceit.

● *God Is Always 'Graceful'*

The essence of the grace of God is simply this—that he is always graceful! Never dis-graceful! Never mawkish! Never awkward! Never out of temper with himself! Never in a cross mood with his children! At the basis of all his scoldings as seen in the old prophets, the unruffled flow of undisturbed love is always evident! He "suffereth long and is kind, seeketh not his own, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things." As the Motive Wheel of the universe of nature and of man, he is never "off balance"!

If we would see God truly we should discern that he has made a trap, a web, a net to lure men to him, devices of love that men can escape only by denying their own deepest instincts. If we call faith in God difficult for us, how much more difficult for him is his faith in us! And yet, through his supernal gracefulness, through his unblemished courtesy, through his genius of indestructible love, he sets his snares for us with undiminished hope. The universe, from the mystery of the planetary system to the mystery of our nervous system, from atomic heat in the sun to "a violet by a mossy stone," from life's storms of passion to our yearning for undiluted love, all of this vast escapade and adventure of consciousness, is but God's trap to inveigle and invite us to him; an invitation to be caught and yet to conquer, to enter the prison and yet be free, to accept defeat and yet grasp our true destiny, to leave our secretive evasions in order to learn his sensational espousals. Out of a perplexing universe God makes his Hall of Courtship.

If to call all this a mousetrap be a degrading use of words, nevertheless the mousetrap has taken on the grandeur of utter freedom and the majesty of unselfish conquest!

● *Persuasiveness in Preaching*

In sermons, extraordinary or commonplace, it is this note of capture by persuasiveness that must prevail. It must dominate every other tone until the disharmonies of hate are lost in the triumphant harmonies of unity, of man at one with himself, at one with his world, because at one with the Eternal. Not without rare insight did George Herbert cry out:

> O mighty love! Man is one world
> And hath another to attend him.

If we lose the note of wooing we lose the substance of any preaching that is worth the preaching, for we are living in a bludgeoning age and

the blood of hatred marks our faces. It is not appeasement that we need or want, but the positively compelling power of the Infinite Persuasion. It is by persuasive force alone that the springtime surprises and traps the seed toward fruitage, using the bait of sunshine and rain. In preaching, no other method is lasting or effective. Eternity is never in a disruptive hurry.

The mousetrap instrumentality is not new with Emerson. It was found in many a scientist of the inner life before Jesus perfected it as the Master Scientist. A few examples may be given; they range from the Old Testament down to modern days. Under other names Elijah used the skillful trap before the prophets of Baal. Gideon used it when he tested his army by making them lap the water from the brook while on the march. Samson used it in every contest with the supposed enemies of God. The Book of Jonah is a mousetrap story through and through, with the whale as a large sized trap! Among non-biblical early writers we find that in 184 B.C. Plautus contributes this: "Consider the little mouse, how sagacious an animal it is which never entrusts its life to one hole." A good prescription against monotony in sermons!

● *Shakespeare and Bunyan*

When we come to Shakespeare we have Hamlet's reply to the usurping king, "What do you call the play?" and Hamlet says, "The mousetrap"; basing his title on his previous conviction, "The play's the thing to catch the conscience of the king." Again, it is John Bunyan who makes Faithful at the river of death bequeath his "skill" as well as his "courage" "to him that can get it." Our modern Amy Lowell is quite plain about the mousetrap of poetry:

> My words are little jars
> Hung all over with mousetraps
> Of metres and cages
> Of bright-plumaged rhythms.

More impressive than all these, of course, is the method of Jesus. He lifts consecrated guile and sacred skill into a main implement of truth: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves." If he never mentions mousetraps, he comes very close to it when he says to his preacher-disciples: "I will make you fishers of men." His divinely-baited hook is plainly seen in the fact that "without a parable spake he not unto them"; to tell a story with entertaining skill and art is the highest point of the educational process. No reverence or timidity should hide from us the fact that Jesus made use of every ingenuity in his spiritual arsenal. He used these skills because he knew that the mind of man is the natural reservoir from which all waters flow into God's open sea of truth. He is the master psychologist who understands man's soul to its depths; the world's master logician because he recognizes man's hunger for reasonableness as well as the illogical tricks that our minds play upon us.

● *Some Implications for Preaching*

In all this Jesus declares plainly enough that life, thought, experience and desire have no meaning unless they are the traps in which the soul is captured by that Boundless Love that "filleth all in all." All of the world's essential meanings are intriguing invitations set in our darkness to release us into light and freedom.

Preaching must discover and use the implications of this method or else we shall not catch up with nor defeat a deceptive world whose snares are more widely spread today than ever before. Against the fifth-column activity of sin, against "the wiles of the devil" must be arrayed the secret counsels of God and the invitational nature of his truth. Without such invitation, man will not respond. It is divine courtesy that says, "I stand at the door and knock," the implication being that the desire of the one who knocks is wholly dependent on the willingness of the one who hears the knock. The persuasion is a mutual undertaking.

Our examples must not omit Paul. He came near to the mousetrap theory when he writes to the Corinthians, "Being crafty, I caught you with guile," and his "I became all things to all men that I might catch some"—the most perfect definition of successful teaching and preaching.

● *In an Age of Propaganda*

Today it is evident that humanity is being caught in all sorts of hidden and tricky snares. Advertising skill, propaganda, intrigue, inverted truth, oily slogans, circuitous diplomacy, boomerang arguments based on falsehood, secret forest fires of mental influence—all these threaten not only our peace but our very sanity. Double-crossing has become our favorite discipline in personal, national and international life. Falsified persuasion threatens the grassroots of civilization. It is all a dreary, deadly and heart-breaking state in which we find ourselves.

In the face of this attack it is not a degrading figure of speech that we have here inadequately traced. If I have made the mousetrap to appear a wrong equipment, a sneaky and unworthy illustration, I am in gross error. But if the Gracefulness of God is nothing else than his truth, beauty and goodness set in the magnetic field of man's whole nature, then the supposed trap turns out to be "an open covenant openly arrived at"; truth is seen to be not a forceful traffic cop but a skill that is resident in every driver's intuitions and knowledge. We must have today a type of soul that knows the roads. Such a soul, such a humanity, will be caught in a vast system—in a trap if we choose to say so; but it will be a free humanity, released at last from dangers and deceit.

Sermons and mousetraps cannot deny their kinship! Even Job sensed their family connection: "these are but the outskirts of his ways, but how small a whisper do we hear of him"!

Fakaofo Island

SOME time ago there appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* the picture of a man-made island. The advertisement reads as follows: "One of the most curious islands of the South Pacific is Fakaofo, north of Samoa. It is virtually a man-made island, about a sixth of a mile in diameter. The natives built it upon a coral foundation, erecting a wall of coral blocks around the outer edge and filling in the center, so that the entire island rises about 15 feet above sea level.

The reason? Fakaofo lies in the path of hurricanes. And when these storms drive the sea over the low-lying shores of neighboring islands, the six hundred inhabitants of Fakaofo remain safe and snug.

Could we not build around our nation a protecting wall of brotherhood? What else will turn the terrible hurricanes of hate that threaten to engulf us?—*W. Glenn McFadden, Church of the Brethren, Troy, Ohio.*

A Hint to America

A FEW months ago I was sitting in the naval air station on Guam. There over the doorway was a triangular board with three clock faces mounted in it, two at the base and one at the apex. Underneath each of them were words indicating the time it showed. Beneath the top clock it said "Guam." Beneath the clock at the lower left it said "Manila." And beneath the one at the lower right it said "San Francisco—*Yesterday.*" For we were beyond the international date line and our time was a day ahead of America. I thought as I looked at those clocks that perhaps the trouble with America is that we are thinking of ourselves yesterday, instead of the Far East *tomorrow.—Clarence Gillett, reported by Frederick A. Neyer, Rockville Centre, N. Y.*

Sermon Illustrations

Contributed by Readers of The Pulpit

Our Need of Worship

THE POET Wordsworth speaks of the subtle snares of disillusionment which the years invariably bring to us and to which we fall victim unless we are on our guard.

"[The youth] . . . by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

Yes, that's what so often happens; our ideals and visions fade into the light of common day, with its common way, its common thinking, its common living, its common doubting, its common sinning. This may be one of the most important reasons for regularity in worship. Is it a mere coincidence that our day is characterized by the prevalence of doubt, cynicism and despair and also by a widespread absenteeism from church worship? Not at all. If we are to save ourselves and the world around us from becoming increasingly contaminated by the common day and the common way, we must repeatedly escape from its vicious pressures by repairing to God's house where we can catch a fresh vision of life as it should be, renew our faith in the uncommon way, and receive a newborn motivation and dynamic to walk therein.—*C. W. Vandenbergh, First Baptist Church, Cortland, N. Y.*

Where Would You Live?

THE magazine *Look* inquired of a number of persons from various parts of the world, "Where would you like most to live?" The reply of a New York woman was: "The place is not so important as the people with whom one lives. If all people had a sense of the importance of their lives, and of the dignity of the individual, it wouldn't matter where we lived." Her idea of unpleasant places has far more to do with persons than with climate or any other external condition. Wherever we live we cannot escape the challenge to impart to those about us a sense of the dignity and importance of their lives.—*John Marvin Rast, Methodist Church, Greenwood, S. C.*

China Teaches America

AN INTERPRETER for the Chinese in the city courts of New York made a fine statement about parents and children in Chinese homes. He said: "The word of the elder is law. The child is taught reverence by his parents. Whenever a Chinese boy or girl is guilty of misconduct in public, it is a disgrace not only to himself or herself, but to the family. And the Chinese family is truly big. We are four hundred and fifty million brothers. Here, if some Chinese boy committed the most minute crime, the whole community would know it, and he would be losing face."

Old China has not lived through all these thousands of years without learning some fine things about life. The emphasis on reverence and discipline helps to explain why China has for centuries stood so high in the estimation of civilized minds.—*The New Outlook.*

From a Christian Home

A HUMBLE itinerant minister of the Wesleyan Church in England was ofttimes discouraged. The work was hard, the compensation meager. How many times he was tempted to give up! But out of that sacrificial home three daughters grew into young womanhood. In course of time all three were married. One became the mother of Burne-Jones, the celebrated artist; one was the mother of Stanley Baldwin, famous prime minister; the other was the mother of Rudyard Kipling.

How Christ Brings Men Life

BACK in 1934 the U. S. Department of Agriculture announced a discovery of great benefit to farmers. A research man had discovered that the longer wave-lengths of light—the red, orange and yellow rays—had the almost miraculous power of rousing seeds from their winter's dormant state and starting them growing several months ahead of schedule. At the same time, he found that the shorter light waves—the violet, blue and green—had the opposite effect and greatly retarded the germination of seeds, actually increasing the time during which they lay dormant. The newspaper announcement went on to say that these scientific discoveries would be a big help to the farmer through their use in seedtesting laboratories, making it possible to predict the quality of the crop in the normally dormant period of the seed.

There is something analogous in the realm of human relations and spirit. There are longer wave-lengths of character and personality that stimulate, develop and enrich by contact and example. There are shorter wave-lengths on the other hand that dull, retard and deaden. And we can predict that association with the one type of character and personality will make for finer people, and that association with the other will have the opposite effect. This is of particular benefit to young people who presumably have a lifetime before them, but it applies to all of us in greater or less degree.

At the time that Jesus of Nazareth gave his life for the cause of finer people and a better world, we read that many of the saints who had fallen asleep arose. This is the reason we call Jesus the Christ. He waked them up and they were alive again. They were new creations in Christ.—*Harold H. Wright, First Congregational-Unitarian Church, Ft. Collins, Colo.*

Automobiles and Churches

WHEN I think of the church and the missionary work I am reminded of the four wheels of an automobile. There are two front wheels for steering and two rear wheels for driving power. In a church, the vision of the world needs for Christianity in response to the Great Commission is comparable to the front wheels of the auto. This gives direction to the travel of the car. The back wheels represent the power which the Spirit of God generates in the individual member which moves the church toward the direction indicated by the Great Commission.

Some cars have well aligned wheels, but no power in the rear end, so they do not move. Other cars have fine motors and rear wheels, but their steering is faulty, so they are wrecked. It takes the cooperation of all wheels to make a safe car.

So with churches: some have grand schemes for the Christianization of the world, but the individual members are not very much concerned about religion personally. Other churches lay great stress upon personal habits and morals, but their concerns stop at the doorsteps of the church. It takes the vision of the world backed by personal witness to keep alive the faith in the Living God.—*Richard L. James, Dallas, Texas.*

"The Source"

HENRY VAN DYKE, in his story "The Source," describes a beautiful and prosperous little city and its surrounding countryside situated in the midst of a desert. The area is an ideal one in which to live and love and labor because of a river which provides an unfailingly abundant supply of water. Yet the river is not "The Source." That is a spring high up in the mountains, a fountain of living water welling up unceasingly, which long ago had been opened by a man who sacrificed his own life in doing it. To keep "The Source" and with it the river and all the channels and fountains depending on it flowing, the people visit the mountain spring each day. They go up with singing and at "The Source" offer their prayers and praises and whisper reverently the beautiful name of their benefactor.

But little by little the people tire of this daily pilgrimage. As the older folks die, the younger turn to other things which leave them little or no time for the visitation. They begin to doubt and at length to deny that the visitations have any worth or meaning. At last "The Source" is forgotten entirely save by one young woman who remembers and continues to worship by its waters each day. In consequence of this prevailing neglect and forgetfulness the spring no longer wells up and overflows. The river bed becomes all but dry. The city and the country round about are impoverished more and more and seem fated to become uninhabitable. It is kept from this complete doom, however, by the faithfulness of the young woman, Ruamie, to whom the wandering visitor who tells the tale says:

"You are the life of the city, for you alone remember. Its secret is in your heart, and your faithful keeping of the hours of visitation is the only cause why the river has not failed altogether and the curse of desolation returned."—*John C. Pryor, First Congregational Church, Weeping Water, Neb.*

Our Upside-Down World

AT the meeting of the United Nations economic commission for Asia and the Far East near Sydney, Australia, a bystander dourly noted that the United Nations flag had been hoisted upside down. He was not properly pleased when the workmen hurriedly corrected the mistake. He sourly asked: "The world is upside down, so why not the world flag?"

Yes, the world is upside down. We have poverty where there ought to be plenty, misery where we ought to have happiness, and strife where we ought to have peace. Only when men begin to take God seriously as revealed in Jesus Christ will the world be turned right side up.—*Carl F. Lueg, Carrollton Ave. Methodist Church, New Orleans, La.*

The Good Provider

SEVERAL years ago there appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* an advertisement of the Bituminous Coal Institute which shows clearly the secularism that has crept into our time. It is a colorful picture of a family seated about the table giving thanks for their meal. But to whom are they giving thanks? Or to what? A large chunk of coal with a halo of light about it is held above their heads by a modern "Atlas"! And in capital letters the caption declares: "Coal . . . the Good Provider" and "Baker of the Bread of Abundance." Perhaps it was not meant to imply that the coal was being worshiped. But do not many in our world today worship that which can provide us only with material goods?—*W. Glenn McFadden, Church of the Brethren, Troy, Ohio.*

Faith Rekindled

EDITH LOVEJOY PIERCE in two short stanzas remarks that one can never tell by looking at the night sky which star holds fast and which has paled to ash. She suggests that an unknown watcher on a distant planet, looking in our direction, still can say, "How very bright the earth!" Her speculation focuses our attention upon that phase of the light of the world which is committed to our keeping. Socially, morally, spiritually we must make sure that no power eclipses the divine radiance. Faith must be rekindled upon the dying embers of despair—faith in the unfailing love of God manifest in Christ.—*John Marvin Rast, Methodist Church, Greenwood, S. C.*

Aftermath of World War

CAPTAIN Tom Crocker, of the Salvation Army's Harbor Light Corps in Chicago, estimates that more than 15,000 veterans of the Second World War, ranging in age from 18 to 30, are swelling the ranks of the derelicts on West Madison street of the great city by the lake. After interviewing more than 1,000 of these young veterans, Crocker declared that the two major factors leading to their disintegration are restlessness growing out of their war experiences and discouragement over the failure of the nations to achieve peace. If active Christians were ever challenged to rise to save humanity, that time is now. As servants of Christ, we must demonstrate our capacity and ability to lead broken lives into a relationship with him which will mean salvation for them.—*Cecil F. McKee, First Christian Church, Huntsville, Texas.*

Poems of Immortality

By THOMAS CURTIS CLARK

Song at Sunrise

Say not that death is king, that night is lord,
That loveliness is passing, beauty dies;
Nor tell me hope's a vain, deceptive dream
Fate lends to life, a pleasing, luring gleam
To light awhile the earth's despondent skies,
Till death brings swift and sure its dread reward.
Say not that youth deceives, but age is true,
That roses quickly pass, while cypress bides,
That happiness is foolish, grief is wise,
That stubborn dust shall choke our human cries.
Death tells new worlds, and life immortal hides
Beyond the veil, which shall all wrongs undo.
This was the tale God breathed to me at dawn
When flooding sunrise told that night was gone.

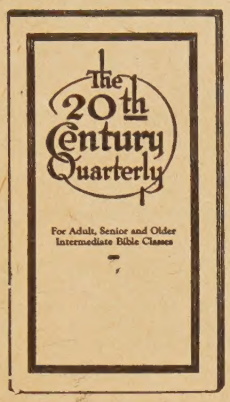
Intimations

If life is but a dream of joy and beauty,
A dream that fades as night bedims our vision,
How rare its prize! How shall we seize and love it—
Till Terror holds us!

And if it be a glimpse of life eternal,
The portal to a world of starry grandeur,
How blest the day of our expectant waiting—
Till Love enfolds us!

The 20th Century Quarterly

Thomas Curtis Clark
Editor



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